

Australian Open

Saturday, 27 January 2024

Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Diede de Groot

Press Conference



D. de GROOT/Y. Kamiji

7-5, 6-4

THE MODERATOR: Diede, congratulations. Six-time Australian Open champion. How does that sound?

DIEDE de GROOT: It sounds really good (smiling). I think I'm very happy with this one especially because it hasn't all been just going in a straight line for me these last few weeks, so I'm very happy to still, on the key moments I was there this match, and that made a difference.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Congratulations. The way you reacted to winning today and then coming up to the mic to give your speech and saying you were speechless, I wonder what you were feeling about this particular victory. Did it feel more significant or why was that reaction for you?

DIEDE de GROOT: I think, like I said, the last couple of weeks have not been going just all my way with a little injury and a cold, a match point down in the preparation tournament.

So it hasn't all been just going fine. I had to work for it very hard this week. Yeah, I think that's what makes this really special.

Q. Close match today. Can you talk me through the key points. When did you make the difference in this match?

DIEDE de GROOT: Yeah, the thing I have been working on really hard these past few weeks is my serve, and somehow it really let me down today (smiling), which is very annoying. But then I guess as a tennis player you have to accept that and still sort of fight through that. I think in the key moments, like 5-4 in the first set -- 6-5 in the first set, I managed to hold my service game. Then also this last game I managed to do that.

I think, yeah, when you hold your serve in wheelchair tennis, I think that's still, like, more difficult than getting a break. So then it's really nice at those key points it's

there, and that's what I'm very proud of.

Q. Unbeaten now at Grand Slams for three years now, 2021. What still motivates you playing these tournaments, winning these tournaments? Novak Djokovic, for example, he still has the motivation to do more. What is your motivation to do more?

DIEDE de GROOT: So, like, I think everyone who saw the match today saw that I was still struggling with my serve, so I can still be such a -- more better? I can still improve so much more than I already am doing now. So finding those little details at the moment is, I think, a very fun process.

Also, I think what motivates me is that the Grand Slams at the moment, they are making things better for us year by year. So then it's fun to give that back (smiling).

So I'm really happy to be here and then to play in front of a lot of people in Kia Arena this year. Then as a player you want to do well.

So those are the things that keep me going.

Q. Hearing you describe your motivation, the records didn't come up. It's other things; improving your game, being part of this growth of wheelchair tennis. But for us as media your records are incredible, reading what you're doing, who you're equaling and who you're passing. Going into the match today, are you aware of those records, like the unbeaten streak, equaling Esther with 21 Grand Slams, all those things, did you go on court knowing you could do all of those things?

DIEDE de GROOT: Well, the funny thing, if my life was without media, I would not be aware, but because there's so much media, because there's social media, because there are so many other people looking at those records, it's impossible to not know.

So, yeah, it slips in my mind even though I put on a brave face and say that it doesn't affect me, of course I'm human and it's something that pops in your head during the match and before the match and the night before I go to bed (smiling).

So, yeah, those are things that stay in my head, but I

think it's very important to sort of put it aside and focus on my game, which maybe today wasn't perfect but still, I managed to work through it.

Q. Is it nice to know that you have those records? I mean, it sounds like it's something you potentially have to park and you want to focus and not be distracted by the records, but you've won a 21st Grand Slam and equaled Esther Vergeer, you are unbeaten in 135 matches. Another one, you passed Shingo for 13 consecutive Grand Slam titles. When you hear those things, do you think, wow, that's amazing?

DIEDE de GROOT: Yeah, of course, they're all amazing. I think, like, it shows that I'm doing so well. So looking back at all of the records, I'm proud of myself, and it shows me, looking back I think it shows me that I'm doing better than I maybe even hoped I would ever do.

So, yes, I'm very proud of that, but to be able to focus on tennis, I need to sort of set it aside, yeah.

Q. I would like to go back to you saying the Grand Slams are improving. Can you give us one or two examples what the Grand Slams are improving in the last years?

DIEDE de GROOT: I think one of the main things is the increasing of the draws. So we've gone from 8 to 12 to 16. I think Australia actually went from 8 to 16, so they took the big step. Which I think is very important for us, because that means that more players can now be professional, as still I think 90% of our income is earned at the Grand Slams. So that means the players who are now also in the draw can invest in their own careers, can take a coach with them, and all of those things. So that has really been, like, a main thing for us.

I think also the part that we're involved into the tournament more than when I started 2016, '17? 2017 was the first year that I played all of the Grand Slams, but we were still sort of, like, a side event. We were here, we were part of the tournament, but we weren't actually part of the tournament.

That's really changed. So we're in the media rooms, we're in the same locker rooms, we're playing in the big courts. So those are the things, like, we're part of the tournament and it feels really welcoming.

Q. I talked to your coach before the press conference, and we talked about what is the Dutch Federation doing better than the other federations regarding wheelchair tennis. You have you, Esther Vergeer, Sam Schroder, Niels Vink. What is the Dutch Federation doing better than the other federations, for example, Germany, where I come from?

DIEDE de GROOT: I think we're actually lucky to be, like, a smaller country; therefore, we can train together. I train with the guys, I train with the girls. So therefore, there's a few moments in the week where we come together, we train together, and it doesn't matter if you're a little bit lower in your level or you're higher. We all train together.

And I think that has helped us from many years before, so I was able to learn from Esther, seeing her up close, seeing how she does throughout the whole week, how does her training look like.

So in part of that we're a little bit lucky that we're a small country so nobody has to drive further than maybe 1.5 hours to train.

Also, we're completely included into the program, so we can use the same facilities as all of the able-bodied. We train next to Tallon Griekspoor, next to Botić. All of those players are doing the same routines that we are doing. It does give us a feeling that we are professional athletes.

Q. This year is a big year with the Olympic goals. What are your main goals for this year? Is it the Golden Slam? We talked about a player yesterday, he had the same plan to conquer the Golden Slam this year with Novak Djokovic. Is the Golden Slam a goal for you?

DIEDE de GROOT: It's not actually possible to do it this year as we won't be at the US Open.

Q. Sorry.

DIEDE de GROOT: No, that's okay. Actually for me it's really special because I was able to do it in 2021. So this year I won't be able to, nobody will be able to do that.

Still, I think the main focus really is playing match for match. Now it will be, yeah, there will be some hard court tournaments, but still my focus will already be at the clay courts for Roland Garros, and then the clay court season will be very important and significant for Paris.

But there is still so many tournaments to go, and like I said, I like to park things or park it aside, set it aside, and then we'll see what's ahead.

Q. Just going back to the question about the more integration with the wheelchair event and the whole tournament, the Australian Open. If you're sharing locker rooms and you're here at the business end of the tournament, have you been seeing Sabalenka and Qinwen tonight before their final? Do you know them? You watch? How is that integration with the able-bodied athletes and the relationship you have with the players still here?

DIEDE de GROOT: So I would say that, like I said, 2017 was the first year, we sort of went, like, unnoticed, whereas now, we're saying hi, we're saying how are you. When your locker is next to someone else you have a little bit of a conversation. So it really feels like we're part of that.

Besides that, I'm a huge tennis fan, so I literally, when the Grand Slam is on, I watch tennis 24/7 if I'm not playing. So, yeah, I follow everything. I will definitely be watching tonight.

Q. Do you have a tip?

DIEDE de GROOT: A tip? Oh. It's gonna be interesting for those players. Whereas one has already done it before but she'll feel the pressure, so she's got experience but she'll have more pressure than the other one who can just go all out, but also, she's never done it before, so she will not know how it feels.

I think just have fun, try to have fun (smiling).

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